

TESTIMONY
H.B. 221

PASTOR
BRAD
KELLY
RUNS Food Bank
in Glenridge

Good Afternoon Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee. My name is Peggy Grimes (Spell Name). I'm the Executive Director of the Montana Food Bank Network. For those of you who are new on this Committee, the Montana Food Bank Network is the only statewide food bank in Montana. Our JOB is to assure that all of our 196 partnering local emergency food providers statewide have the food they need to meet the growing demand caused by the loss of jobs, and the increasing costs of food,

fuel and housing our neighbors are experiencing throughout Montana.

The Montana Food Bank Network is a private sector operation. Our efficiencies are proven in our ability to move millions of pounds of food across the 4th largest State in the country with an administrative overhead rate of just 6%. This means that 94 cents on every dollar received goes to getting food to where it is most needed.

Two years ago, and for the first time, I stood before this Committee with a request for one-time only funding to purchase food for the emergency food system. At that time, the number of

individuals accessing emergency food jumped by 20% in one year.

Unfortunately, due to the recession, food donations were decreasing at the same time the need was escalating. The Legislature provided \$2 million in one-time only funds to purchase food. Those dollars provided an additional 3.3 million pounds of food in the first 18 months of the biennium. With these funds

Montana Food Bank Network was able to distribute 7.4 million pounds of food in 2009 and 8.5 million pounds in 2010.

This food went to local food pantries, soup kitchens, faith-based organizations, rescue missions, youth homes, boys and

girls clubs, teen recovery centers, group homes and senior centers across our State. Because of the Montana Food Bank Network's leveraging power through buying in truckload quantity, and our ability to access national food donations through our partnership with Feeding America, the national food bank network, we are able to make these dollars go much farther than a small local pantry.

Unfortunately, the economy has not improved and instead of seeing people go back to work or families more able to provide for their own food needs, we saw further increases in the need for

emergency food. I just provided a handout capturing our statistics through 2009. However, I do have early draft numbers for last year. In 2010, 175,501 Montanans received food from an emergency feeding program. The total number of visits for the year was 910,888. So although there was not a significant increase in total visits in 2010, more individuals found themselves in need of emergency food than in 2009. Also, please remember that the 2010 numbers are not our final numbers for the year. When you compare the number of individuals receiving emergency food in 2010 with the 88,814

people needing food in 2008, which was prior to receiving the current funding, that's a 98% increase in participation over two years. Without the funds provided by the 2009 Legislature, people who lost their job in 2009 or 2010 would not have been able to rely on their local food pantry for food. So let me congratulate this body for its foresight in providing the necessary funds to assure that the emergency food system was strong enough to meet that demand.

I know this Committee will be faced with some very difficult decisions in where money should be spent, but I implore you to please consider the fact that the

most basic of needs – food, must be a consideration. Please do not leave this session without assuring that every Montanan (your constituents) have food on their table as you endeavor to help create the jobs that will put them back to work so they can provide for themselves.

The private sector cannot meet this demand alone. It is my fervent hope that we will not be back again next Session. However, right now we must work together as a private/public partnership to get the job done.

So I ask you today to put your “pennies” together with our “pennies” and let’s

make sure no one in Montana has to skip meals in order for their children to eat, or that children have to go to school hungry, anxiously awaiting school lunch to get something in their stomach so they can think and learn and become the citizens of tomorrow, some of whom may then be sitting in your chairs making the decisions for our State.

Thank You.

Testimony in Support of HB 221
Minkie Medora
Chair, Food Security Council
Montana Food Bank Network

January 17, 2011

Chairman McNutt, Members of the House Appropriations committee:

My name is Minkie Medora, I am a registered dietitian and have been on the board of the Montana Food Bank Network for several years. I also serve as Chair of the Food Security Council, a group that works to pursue long term and sustainable solutions to hunger and food insecurity in Montana.

Montana Food Bank Network (MFBN) has worked tirelessly for several years now to feed hungry people in Montana, with private donations of food and funding. However the rapid decline in the economic status of our state with the 2007 recession has increased demand for food throughout the state, and this demand far exceeds the resources of the Network.

In these very difficult economic times, a growing number of working people are not making a livable wage. Many are currently unemployed and ready to take on jobs, but jobs are scarce, and those that exist pay very poorly. Besides the working poor, there are a large number of people living on fixed incomes, those that worked all their lives and retired, as well as those that are disabled and no longer employable.

MFBN works on alleviating hunger in two major ways. The first, and most critical role is to provide food to people whose resources for acquiring food are gone and there is no money left for food. The other important role is pursued through the mission of the Food Security Council – whose members look at studying the level of hunger in various parts of the state, in understanding the causes of hunger, and the barriers to accessing public food programs. In this work we identify opportunities for policy and system changes that allow access to food through public and private food programs, in order to reduce the demand for emergency food.

In this 62nd Legislative Session, we are approaching the legislature on both fronts. HB 221 is seeking funding help so that hungry people can be fed. At the same time, a Study Resolution has been submitted – LC1088 to study the serious problems of Childhood Hunger in Montana. This resolution – if approved, will work on understanding all current food programs for children, finding options to increase public and private collaboration at state and community levels, and develop policy recommendations for the 2013 session.

The two bills create a strong synergy and complement each other by meeting both immediate and long-term, sustainable needs for food in the state. Even though the Resolution focuses on the needs of children, by improving the situation for children, families in general would benefit from this effort.

However, until such time as policy and system changes can happen, people in Montana who are hungry need food to eat. At the end of the day, all of us need to know that there is food available for families and that people are not going to bed hungry in our great state.

Therefore, I urge you to consider supporting this critical need to provide emergency food and reducing hunger in Montana by funding HB 221.

Thank you

Respectfully,

Minkie Medora, MS, RD